

Nausea/disgust notes

The narrator, Antoine Rocquentin, in early 1932 begins writing a diary in Bouville, a small coastal town, where he has gone to finish his historical research project.

Objects should not *touch* because they are not alive. You use them, put them back in place, you live among them: they are useful, nothing more. But they touch me, it is unbearable. I am afraid of being in contact with them as though they were living beasts.

Now I see: I recall better what I felt the other day at the seashore when I held the pebble. It was a sort of sweetish sickness. How unpleasant it was! It came from the stone, I'm sure of it, it passed from the stone to my hand. Yes, that's it, that's just it—a sort of nausea in the hands.

pp. 10-11

This first experience begins his interior journey which reaches a crescendo near the end of the book. The material world, both inanimate and alive (most cogently in a chestnut tree, its roots and stump) impinges on him. He begins to understand existence, his existence, and that it contains an irreducible element of the absurd. He reaches a cataclysm of consciousness:

This moment was extraordinary. I was there, motionless and icy, plunged in a horrible ecstasy. But something fresh had just appeared in the very heart of this ecstasy; I understood the Nausea. I possessed it. To tell the truth, I did not formulate my discoveries to myself. But I think it would be easy for me to put them in words now. The essential thing is contingency. I mean that one cannot define existence as necessity. To exist is simply to be there. Those who exist let themselves be encountered, but you can never deduce anything from them. P.131

Reality as pure existence: disgusting. The mind, our mind, asks for meaning. Yet here is no meaning, just being.